

Chronology of Key Highlights in the History of the Minnesota Guardian ad Litem Program

Minnesota's Guardian ad Litem program(s) have undergone significant, almost continuous, change in the last seventeen years.

In 1995, in response to numerous concerns raised by citizens to the Legislature, the Legislative Auditor conducted a statewide review of GAL services and in their report concluded that:

"There are 53 local (county-funded) programs. There is little consistency in how counties recruit, select, and supervise guardians. There is no standard training, no system to process complaints and no uniform procedures to remove a GAL. The Supreme Court needs to develop broad guidelines addressing recruitment, selection, supervision, and evaluation for programs to use in administering their program."

In response to the Legislative Auditor's Report on the Guardian ad Litem System, the Minnesota Supreme Court and Judicial Branch implemented the following systemic change efforts to address the concerns raised in the report:

- (1997) The *Supreme Court Advisory Task Force on Guardian ad Litem System* met for a year and concluded that:

"There is growing awareness that guardians ad litem may be better equipped to advocate for the best interests of children if they are part of a well-managed, structured guardian ad litem program operating under clearly defined policies and procedures for selecting, training, supervising, evaluating, and removing guardians ad litem."

The Task Force recommended Rules of GAL Procedure, training requirements and administrative standards to improve performance and accountability.

- (1999) The Supreme Court promulgated *Rules of Guardian ad Litem Procedure* which stipulated the standards for recruitment, selection, training, supervision, complaint processing, and oversight of the work of Guardians ad Litem in the 53 local, county-based programs which had responsibility for the program(s). Mandatory statewide forty hour training was required of all Guardians ad litem in the state.
- (2001) *State Funding of Guardian ad Litem Program* and State Funding Subcommittee Report on how to best transition the local programs over to state funding and to address the disparate program models that existed at the county level.
- (2002) A *State Supervised and Judicial District Administered GAL Program* is designed and implemented by the Conference of Chief Judges. Management and oversight responsibilities are delineated between the state office and the ten district programs.

Promoting more consistent, high quality and accountable advocacy became the state wide mission of the program.

- (2003) In light of the creation of the new statewide GAL Program, the Minnesota Supreme Court organized a Subcommittee of the Juvenile Protection Rules Committee (the full Committee) to review and propose revisions to the *Minnesota Rules of GAL Procedure and GAL-Related Rules of Procedure*. The Subcommittee included some members from the full Committee and others with expertise as a GAL, GAL manager or supervisor, judicial district administrator, and judicial branch labor relations manager.
- (2005) A Statewide “*Guardian ad Litem Quality Assurance Review Procedure*” is implemented statewide to ascertain performance issues within the ten district programs and areas of improvement.
- (2005-2007) “*GAL System Program Standards*” are developed which became the responsibility of the State Court Administrator to implement and which could be adjusted and raised more readily than Supreme Court rules. The Program Standards articulate the requirements of each district GAL program regarding: recruitment, selection, screening, background checks, supervision, performance evaluation, responsibilities, training, and the complaint procedure.
- (2005-6) A *Guardian Ad Litem Employment Model Workgroup* is formed by the Judicial Council to look at the disparate staffing approaches still being employed by the district GAL programs and to make recommendations for improvement.

The Workgroup recommended to the Council that they:

1. Increase qualifications and training standards (and commensurate reimbursement to attract more qualified individuals).
 2. Create a GAL Training Institute and Certificate Program.
 3. Create a GAL Advisory Committee to address the long term staffing model issue and other systemic challenges.
- (2007-2008) A *Guardian ad Litem Advisory Committee* (GALAC) is formed by the Minnesota Judicial Council with a charge to: *examine the long-term and systemic challenges facing the Guardian ad Litem Program and to develop and make recommendations to the State Court Administrator regarding possible solutions and the benefits and trade-offs inherent in each option.*
 - (2009) Judicial Council decides to move the Guardian ad Litem Program out of the court system and create an independent Guardian ad Litem Board based on GALAC recommendations. The Judicial Council seeks legislation to establish the new Board.

- (2010) The Legislature passes Minn. Stat. §480.35 to move the Guardian ad Litem Program out of the court system and establish an independent Guardian ad Litem Board.
- (October 2010) The first Guardian ad Litem Board is convened with seven members, four appointed by the Governor and three appointed by the Chief Justice.
- (January 2011) The Guardian ad Litem Board hires a Program Administrator.